



# University of HUDDERSFIELD

## University of Huddersfield Repository

Canter, David V. and Youngs, Donna E.

Personality and crime

### Original Citation

Canter, David V. and Youngs, Donna E. (2009) Personality and crime. In: The Cambridge handbook of personality psychology. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK. ISBN 9780521862189

This version is available at <http://eprints.hud.ac.uk/8038/>

The University Repository is a digital collection of the research output of the University, available on Open Access. Copyright and Moral Rights for the items on this site are retained by the individual author and/or other copyright owners. Users may access full items free of charge; copies of full text items generally can be reproduced, displayed or performed and given to third parties in any format or medium for personal research or study, educational or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge, provided:

- The authors, title and full bibliographic details is credited in any copy;
- A hyperlink and/or URL is included for the original metadata page; and
- The content is not changed in any way.

For more information, including our policy and submission procedure, please contact the Repository Team at: [E.mailbox@hud.ac.uk](mailto:E.mailbox@hud.ac.uk).

<http://eprints.hud.ac.uk/>

# 45 Personality and crime

David Canter and Donna Youngs

The relationship between personality and crime is complex. Because most criminals are to some degree versatile there has been a tendency to focus on the general characteristics that distinguish criminals from non-criminals. The general trends from these studies are rather weak, but add up to the prospect that criminals tend to act impulsively with disregard for others or the norms of society, i.e. they are criminal. The attempt to link violent crime, in particular, to mental disorder has also proved problematic except at the extremes of the personality disorder continuum.

In recent years, studies have demonstrated that there are some differences in the sorts of offences that any given criminal prefers to commit. The major distinction here relates to the interpersonal characteristics of the crime and thus opens up the possibility that it is the characteristic way of dealing with others that may be an important personality dimension for distinguishing between criminals. A further aspect that is emerging is based on the exploration of what the emotional benefits to the offender are in carrying out the crime and how they are embedded in their personal narratives.

These issues are relevant to many areas of application including the popularly misconceived aspects of 'offender profiling', which is often misunderstood as a process by which, through analysis of a crime, an offender's personality can be described.

## Why should personality relate to crime?

In popular understanding criminals are assumed to be distinct from the rest of law-abiding society. The question often follows from this premise of how a person may come to be part of that separate sub-group of humanity? The simple and often favoured answer is that there is something distinct about the sort of people who commit crimes which sets them apart. In other words, it is assumed that criminals have a different personality and that, in effect, it is this personality that *causes* them to become criminal.

The assumption that there is a criminal personality underlies all claims that criminals are 'born not made', i.e. that there is some significant genetic factor that creates the conditions for criminality. But it is also implicit in arguments about the social processes that may give rise to criminality, the so called 'nurture' of

criminals, because the social process is seen as creating a particular type of person, prone to carry out criminal acts. The more subtle and generally accepted argument that some form of interaction between psychophysiological make-up and environment gives rise to offending, still assigns considerable weight to an assumption that there are some enduring characteristics of people that are the basis of their offending; their 'personality'.

There is a very important consequence of looking for the causes of criminality within aspects of a person's make-up, whether it derives from nature or nurture. This is the consequent implication that criminals are not really responsible for their actions, but it is whatever created their personality that is to blame. Such a view is at variance with the legal perspective on criminality, which holds a mentally competent person to be fully responsible for his or her actions. If it is not the person as such who intentionally committed the criminal act, but something about their 'personality' that made them do it, then this undermines the whole basis for conviction and punishment. If psychology is not to be dismissed by the law as being irrelevant to legal decision-making, a way needs to be found that will accommodate personal accountability with aspects of personality.

In other words, if psychologists are to have some 'professional humility' (as discussed by Canter 2007) they must recognize that the legal notion of *mens rea*, whereby the criminal has a clear and conscious intent to commit the act, assigns the active role to the person. This role involves more than just a manifestation of their enduring characteristics as captured by the psychological conceptualization of personality. An understanding of the role invites a careful consideration of the nature of crime and criminality, together with a full exploration of what aspects of personality are likely to be relevant. If psychological perspectives on crime and personality can be connected to the ancient and well-established legal perspective on offenders' *mens rea* then the benefits to both psychology and the law could be very great indeed.

### **Problem of specifying what is criminal**

The starting point for understanding how the legal perspective on offending can be made compatible with psychological theories is to recognize that the view that offenders have personalities that can be distinguished from the rest of the population does not survive as a simple explanation of criminality after even moderately close scrutiny. The major challenges to this view come from an understanding of crime rather than of personality.

The first problem comes from the fact that crime is not one objectively defined, universal set of actions. It is the interpretations of actions that make them criminal. These interpretations come from the legal and cultural context within which actions occur. Even the most obviously offensive action of killing another person may not be criminal, for example when perpetrated by a soldier in a war or, in some jurisdictions, in defence of one's own life. More complex and subtle issues

surround crimes such as rape, where consent is a central factor, and theft, where intention to steal is crucial. When it comes to fraud and other crimes typically associated with bureaucracies and professional work, then the laws of the land may vary so considerably from one country to another that what is illegal in one place may be common practice in another.

The variability on what a criminal act is leads to the awareness that any link between personality and crime cannot be a simple function of the nature of the act. It does not make sense to look for a relationship between criminal violence, say, and aspects of personality, if those acts of violence may be condoned or even encouraged in some contexts and totally outlawed in others. Unless a rather indefensible and implicitly racist argument is put forward that, for example, especially violent societies are made up of people with different personalities from more peaceful societies, then the variations in the prevalence of different types of crime show that it is not the acts themselves that have psychological roots but the meaning of those actions within their socio-cultural context.

This contextualization of the meaning of offending opens the possibility that the personality characteristics of relevance are those that are more to do with law-breaking and the refusal, or inability, to follow the norms of society than any particular predilection for specific sorts of criminal acts. Taken at face value this would lead to the assumption that criminals just have some lower level of moral reasoning than non-criminals. They are just more primitive in their acceptance of what is moral. However, a number of studies discussed by Stephenson (1992) which attempted to employ Kohlberg's (1981) idea of moral development to test whether it was the basis of criminality, found that there was no simple link between criminal actions and scores on a Kohlberg test (Emler, Heather and Winton 1978; Jurokovic 1980).

What the studies of moral development in delinquents and others do reveal is that actions are not a simple function of moral perspective but relate to the nature of the context. As Denton and Krebs (1990), for example, show, people bring their particular level of morality to bear on the situation as they see it. In other words, when considering criminal activity it is simple-minded to regard all law-breaking as psychologically equivalent, or even that the same action would have the same criminal meaning in two different situations.

In every culture crime covers a great variety of very different sorts of activities, from fraud to serial killing of strangers. Even within a sub-group of crimes there are big variations. Burglary can include stealing a purse through an open window or breaking into a fortified warehouse to steal carefully selected works of art. Fraud can be signing a cheque from someone else's account or a complex abuse of pension funds. Murder can be a violent emotional outburst or a studied and prepared killing for profit. It seems unlikely that the same personality issues are relevant for all these different forms of law-breaking. Indeed, one would expect individuals who choose to act in rather different ways in pursuance of the same overt aim (e.g., obtaining funds) may be more distinct from each other than people who seek different objects by the same means.

The problem of the variety of activities that can be criminal is compounded by the lack of any strong psychological basis to legal definitions of crimes. An arson attack carried out to hide the evidence of a crime would be classed as the same sort of crime as one which was an act of revenge. This is a problem of particular significance when reviewing published accounts of psychological research on crime. When studies are carried out of the characteristics of offenders, they typically use the legal definition of the crime for which the offender was convicted, not some subtler exploration of what sort of actions were involved.

These considerations indicate that a distinction needs to be made in relation to the level in the hierarchy of criminal behaviour at which the criminality is defined. Canter and Youngs (2003) make a distinction between three broad aspects of criminality. The most general is between those who commit crimes and those who do not. In practice, this tends to mean those who have been convicted of crimes and those who have not. Such a distinction is, of course, fraught with the difficulty that many people do something illegal for which they are not caught. There is no easy way of determining if those who are caught are different from those who are not, although recent research by Youngs, Canter and Cooper (2004) does indicate that there are important differences in what people are convicted of and what they will admit to anonymously. These differences understandably vary with the seriousness of the crime. The less serious, the more likely are the official criminal records to under-record the amount of criminal activity. But such concerns do mean that studies of criminals that assign them to categories based on their official records have to be treated with caution.

There is the further problem that people who are convicted of crimes will have been sentenced before they become part of a research sample. Often they will be in prison. In his extensive review, Haney (2007) has shown that prisons have wide-ranging debilitating effects on their inmates. It is therefore difficult to establish if the responses obtained in prison are a valid reflection of how the respondent would react when not incarcerated. There is also the strong possibility that the answers prisoners give to any questions are not necessarily truthful, but will serve their purposes within prison and the legal system.

Beyond the comparison of people who are criminal or not, with all the difficulties that throws up, is the more refined comparison of offenders who have committed different types of crime. There are two crucial difficulties in doing this. One is that research generally points to a broad versatility in offending. Many people who commit more than one crime commit a mix of different sorts of crimes. Thus, specifying someone as a burglar, or fraudster, or rapist, may be ignoring the fact that in whichever category he is placed, he has also carried out at some time the offences in the other categories. This understanding of how to distinguish between offenders appropriately would be crucial in identifying any personality-crime relationship. The way forward, as Canter and Youngs (2008) show in some detail, would appear to lie in the recognition that some forms of criminality are general to most offenders, while other forms of criminal action are more specialized. It is then this sub-group of specialized criminal activity that is

most productive as the basis for distinguishing between offenders rather than looking for distinct and exclusive overall patterns of offending.

A second difficulty is that, like other people, criminals develop and change over time. Changes in physical abilities, knowledge or skills may lead them into different sorts of criminal actions. Thus, assigning them to a particular type of criminality may be short-lived. As Youngs (2007) discusses, this means that any attempt to specify the characteristics of an offender that are revealed by criminal actions require a careful and subtle exploration of both the context of the crime and the likely stage in the offender's criminal and psychological development.

Yet another level of refinement may be to consider what may be called the 'style' of criminality; how offenders go about carrying out their crimes. This has been the focus of a number of studies carried out within the realm of Investigative Psychology. Here, the attempt is to distinguish within crimes of a similar type, for example rape (Canter *et al.* 2003), arson (Fritzon, Canter and Wilton 2001) or homicide (Salfati and Haratsis 2001). The studies look closely at exactly what went on within any given crime and assign the crime to a particular theme on the basis of a multivariate statistical analysis. Linking such variations in the thematic emphasis to variations in personality is, however, extremely problematic, for two reasons. One as Youngs (2007) has discussed in some detail, is that it cannot be expected that offenders will be precisely consistent from one crime to the next, so some estimate and compromise needs to be made if an offender is to be assigned to a particular style.

A more practical problem is that it is extremely difficult to obtain both detailed information about what went on in an offence and about the offender's personality as measured by some standardized means. For these and other practical reasons the possibility of linking offence style to personality remains to be thoroughly explored, although one intriguing study by Lobato (2000) does show the potential for this type of exploration. She found that the degree of Extraversion of offenders in Brazil did relate to the weapons they preferred to use. As might be expected, the extraverts chose large obvious weapons like machine guns, the introverts smaller discrete weapons like pistols. However, such studies relating the details of how offences are committed to personality are very unusual.

### **Mental disorder and crime**

The complexity and variety of criminal activity has not prevented a substantial body of research being carried out to explore the forms of mental illness or, more generally, mental disorder that may be at the heart of criminality. Such studies, though, are confounded by their focus being in the main on clinical populations. This has meant that the aspect of the examination of criminals that emphasizes a clinical psychological or psychiatric perspective has tended to be biased towards rather extreme and unusual sub-sets of criminals. In essence, the people studied by clinicians have been those who have been referred to them for treatment, or people who are in an environment that has at least therapeutic aims,

if not therapeutic achievements. They, therefore, are likely to be people who are obviously mentally disturbed or whose crimes have bizarre or extreme qualities to them, such as serial rape, or arson, or violent homicide.

The clinical focus has produced the rather distorted picture that much of the psychological literature on offending is devoted to violent criminals and those whose actions are extreme and rare, whereas the broader criminological literature tends to explore the actions of delinquents and those who have carried out what is often called 'volume crime', such as burglary, theft and car crime. It is perhaps therefore not surprising that there is such a difference in perspective between criminologists and clinical psychologists about the causes of crime because they are really talking about different populations.

The question thus emerges as to the role of mental illness in criminality. This is remarkably difficult to determine, but Singleton *et al.* (1998) do report that mental disorder amongst prison groups range from 10 to 78 per cent. Thus, although this is a very wide range, showing how diverse different prison groups are, it is nonetheless rather higher than would be expected for the population at large, which Singleton *et al.* (2001) put at not more than 19 per cent. The challenge here, though, is to disentangle cause from effect. The people assessed were in prison. As Haney (2007) has reviewed, prison can be very debilitating. Indeed, as Ly and Foster (2005) point out, a high proportion of people identified as mentally disordered find their way into hospital from prison. The issue may be clarified by a consideration of the nature of the mental disorder that relates to offending. Hodgins *et al.* (1996) claim that a higher proportion of people diagnosed with schizophrenia and personality disorder commit violent crimes and are involved in general criminality than people without such disorders.

The interpretation of these general results requires the sort of close analysis that is often not possible from the way the broad statistics are presented. Perhaps people unable to cope in the way that is typical of schizophrenia are more likely to be caught or to find themselves in situations that are interpreted as criminal, or they may be drawn more readily from a criminogenic environment? Certainly Ly and Foster (2005) report that only a very small proportion of people diagnosed with a psychotic illness are criminally active.

The role of personality disorder is rather more problematic. It is widely demonstrated that people who are classified as psychopathic are more likely to commit serious crimes. Hare (2003), who developed the most widely used systematic procedure for assessing psychopathy, claims it is a very good predictor of offending violence. The difficulty in taking this claim at its face value relates to the nature of the assessment process and the way in which psychopathy is defined. Cooke (2007, p. 108) described psychopathy as:

a personality disorder, that is a chronic disturbance in an individual's relations with self, others and their environment which results in distress or failure to fulfil social roles and obligations ... that is characterised by ... an interpersonal style which is dominant, forceful, deceptive and grandiose, by ... a failure to experience remorse or guilt, and by behaviour that can be described as impulsive or reckless.

Such a definition clearly describes a chronic criminal. There can be no surprise that impulsive, reckless people who do not feel guilt and tend to deceit and dominance may commit many crimes, including especially violent crimes. What the 'diagnosis' of psychopathy adds is the proposal that this is an enduring characteristic of the individual which will be reflected in many aspects of his life, especially in his dealings with others. It draws attention to the criminal activity being an integrated part of how the person deals with the world, not some aberrant act that is 'out of character'. Psychopathy therefore is especially helpful when considering offenders whose actions are chronically violent and disruptive. At the extremes of the rating scale, assigning the person to a clinical category may be of help in focusing attention on the sorts of assistance the person needs rather than just concentrating on his criminal actions and the punishment they deserve.

In general, then, although many offenders are characterized by some form of mental disorder, a very small proportion of the mentally disordered population turn to crime. There are some extreme forms of mental illness, notably paranoid schizophrenia that may lead some of its sufferers to be more violent than the population at large, but even those trends are slight and do not support the view that the illness causes the violence. Indeed, through the *McNaughten* rule that emerged out of the case of a mentally ill man attempting to kill the Prime Minister in 1843, and similar US guidelines such as the Brawner Rule established in 1962, most legal systems recognize that a person can be 'not guilty by reason of insanity' (O'Reilly-Fleming 1992). This accepts that there is a difference between a mentally ill offender and one who is not, thus presuming that the great majority of criminality is not shaped by mental illness. The suggestion that personality can be 'disordered' (O'Leary 1993), such as in the diagnosis of psychopathy, rather blurs the boundary between the actions of an chronic offender and the cognitive and emotional processes that may be seen as the psychological basis of those actions. This blurring can become of particular significance if legislation is introduced that would allow people to be incarcerated because of an assessment of their thoughts and emotions rather than their actions, as has been proposed by some in recent years.

### Characterizing offenders

Thus, although there has been a tendency to look for mental disorder as a basis for criminality, careful study indicates that it is only at the extremes that such an aspect of a person may be considered relevant. Even within the criminal community, mental illness does not appear to be a distinguishing feature. The most fundamental distinctions between people who typically offend and those who do not derive from differences in their family and social experiences. Criminals in general come from dysfunctional families that are deprived, have lower socio-economic backgrounds and exist within a culture of crime (Farrington



*et al.* 2001). However, although growing up in a criminal environment in which offending may not only be accepted but actively encouraged provides a basis for understanding many criminal acts, it cannot be the whole explanation. The majority of people who grow up in such environments are not criminals and many criminals have their origins in quite different sorts of families and cultures. It is therefore tempting to look for aspects of criminals which make them especially vulnerable to opportunities for crime.

One feature of offenders that many researchers claim regularly distinguishes criminals from non-offenders is their intellectual ability. In contrast to the public image of the highly intelligent master criminal, Farrington in his (1995) study of 411 London boys showed that those who became persistent criminals had below average IQs at ages eight to ten. Lynam, Moffitt and Stouthamer-Loeber (1993) reported that offenders typically had IQs eight to ten points lower than non-criminals. This puts many criminals in learning disabled categories, where they would require educational support to be effective. Curiously, it is rare for people to mention failures of educational systems as a possible cause of crime, although many prison programmes do emphasize the need to educate inmates.

Lynam *et al.* (1993) show that the average lower IQ of persistent criminals survives careful analysis allowing for family backgrounds, ethnicity and socio-economic status, although subsequent studies, notably by Cullen *et al.* (1997) with very careful analysis using different measures of criminality came to the conclusion that IQ has only a moderate correlation with offending. Even this weaker claim for the role of intellectual ability in criminality is open to question, not least because IQ itself is only a moderate indicator of a later effectiveness in life that would protect against becoming involved in criminality. As Richardson (1999) has discussed in detail, IQ is mainly an assessment of ability to cope with the educational environment. It says nothing about how an individual who can hardly read or write is still able to avoid detection for considerable time, being wise to ways of the street. Indeed as Roazzi showed many years ago (1990, personal communication), street children in Brazil may not pass maths tests but can calculate currency exchange and other financial dealings at the high level they need to survive on the fringes of society.

The general intellectual weakness of prolific offenders may be more readily understood as part of their lack of commitment or focus on ways of behaving that accord with social norms. This is reflected in some studies by an emphasis on criminals' impulsivity and sensation-seeking (e.g. Horvath and Zuckerman 1992) and in others by low social skills (Dishion *et al.* 1984). Indeed, Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) developed the earlier perspective of Hirschi (1969) to argue that the fundamental explanation of criminality is a lack of control over antisocial behaviour. This view draws together a number of the perspectives that emphasize characteristics of persistently criminal individuals; they do not have the intelligence or social skills to deal appropriately with others, and they have a higher propensity to seek out gratifying sensations than non-criminals. It has even been suggested, especially by Gatzke-Kopp and her colleagues (2002), that the

sensation-seeking is a product of persistent offenders' low levels of arousal as indicated by their reduced resting skin conductance.

The view that there is a physiological basis to criminality inherent in the impulsivity and lack of control over desires for gratification accords well with the most widely quoted claims of the link between personality and criminality derived from Eysenck and Gudjonsson's (1989) studies that showed that, in general, criminals tended to be more extravert and neurotic than the population at large. They explained that these higher personality scores were related to lower levels of autonomic arousal which in turn gave rise to a limited ability to learn. It was this lack of responsiveness to reinforcement that meant offenders did not internalize the rules of society and thus were more likely to perpetrate antisocial acts.

### **Distinguishing between offenders**

Given the complexity of defining what is criminal and the range of criminal acts, any simple explanations of criminality relating directly to some key aspect of personality, whether 'disordered' or not, have to be treated with some scepticism. Certainly, many offenders do learn to be very skilled as criminals, and can be patient in planning their crimes and ensuring they can escape. There are also wide variations between offenders in their impulsivity, arousal-seeking and Extraversion, as well as there being a notable proportion who do not have low IQ or poor social skills. It may therefore be more appropriate to consider the other side of the coin. Perhaps intelligence, Introversion, social skill and self-control are protective factors that enable people to avoid the temptations of crime that may be present in their social environment? But such protective factors are likely to interact in a variety of complex ways with the different opportunities for crime that are available in any given context.

Of even greater significance may be the types of positive reinforcement for actions from which offenders may have a propensity to learn. In other words, rather than considering the generality of criminality it may be more appropriate to consider the different patterns of learning that may be typical of different emphases in offending. This is more clearly expressed by Bandura (1986) as differentiation in the incentives that dominate any person's actions. Youngs (2004) argues that Bandura's social cognitive theory of behaviour implies that the social context of criminality gives shape to the forms of incentive that may characterize any individual offender. Thus, rather than a limited capacity to learn, offenders learn that criminal behaviours are rewarding and different offenders learn that different particular criminal reinforcements are satisfying. They may be distinguished then by the particular incentives that dominate and differentiate their criminal actions.

Youngs proposes that because social cognitive theory posits that the performance of behaviour is first acquired (or learned) vicariously through exposure to social models, it is dependent on, and shaped by, positive reinforcement relating to

different combinations of fundamental human incentives. Grounded in the core biological and cognitive processes of human beings, the incentives motivate by providing particular sets of outcome expectations for a given behaviour. To the extent that different criminal behaviours carry different sets of outcome expectations she proposes that these incentives will provide the basis for the differentiation of criminal styles. For the full range of human action, Bandura (1986) puts forward seven different fundamental incentives: Primary incentives, Sensory incentives, Social incentives, Monetary incentives, Activity incentives, Power/Status incentives and Self-Evaluative incentives. In Youngs' framework, criminal and deviant behaviours form a distinct sub-set of this general set of human actions, distinguished from other behaviour by the contravention of the legal and/or moral code involved. It may be then that a sub-set of the incentives is sufficient to account for variation in criminal involvement.

Youngs argues that three of Bandura's incentives are highly pertinent to the range of acts covered by mainstream criminality: Monetary, Power/Status and Sensory incentives. The Monetary incentive is about acquiring the ability to obtain whatever one desires. Where this means taking from others in some way, the behaviour will typically fall within the realms of criminality. Behaviours as diverse as forging a cheque, carrying out a bank robbery, or stealing cash from a wallet, can be readily understood as normal attempts to acquire monetary gain but through means which society deems criminal. The incentive underlying all these behaviours is best conceptualized as a Material incentive, rather than a Monetary incentive, since the gain is actually derived from the possession of the goods in a material sense. Moreover, goods are not desired simply for their monetary value alone. The possession of goods may be rewarding in a variety of other ways, such as in a symbolic sense or an emotional or physical sense.

Power and Status incentives provide a further form of motivation. The principal goal here is obtaining control over others. As Bandura points out, most societies and groups are structured as a status or power-based hierarchy. People's behaviours are shaped by the desire to increase their rank in these hierarchies. Bandura argues that the Power and Status incentives motivate independently of the material benefits increased power affords. There is a range of behaviours that people may use to acquire this type of control. The Power and Status incentive is highly relevant to crime since in many cases the behaviours used to acquire control will be criminal. In particular, where violence or certain coercive tactics are used, almost invariably the activity would fall within the realms of criminality.

Sensory incentives motivate human behaviour through the desire for novel, pleasurable, stimulating experiences and the avoidance of aversive experiences, including boredom. Katz (1988, p. 3) highlights the role of sensory reward in criminal behaviour, discussing at length 'the seductive qualities of crimes: those aspects in the foreground of criminality that makes its various forms sensible, even sensually compelling, ways of being'. Where individuals attempt to achieve this type of gain through destruction these behaviours will tend to fall within the scope of criminal activity. Other types of activity may carry sensory gain *because* of their

deviant or criminal status. As such, the sensory gain would be derived from the internal stimulation of the emotional effects associated with committing a proscribed behaviour, rather than the direct stimulation of the senses.

This framework incorporates the possibilities of Extraversion and low self-control as well as sensation-seeking, but it suggests that these will be reflected in different ways by different criminals because of the different mix of incentives that they have learned will help satisfy them. This implies that style of offending may be considered a direct aspect of personality in its own right, rather than some by-product of a more general enduring characteristic of the person.

Youngs finds support for this perspective in the co-occurrence of self-reported criminal actions. She demonstrated this by analysing the patterns of co-occurrence of self-reported crimes of 207 offenders. This allowed her to assign offenders to one of three dominant criminal styles that she was able to show described behaviours reflecting the Material, Power and Sensory incentives respectively.

### **Crime as an interpersonal activity**

The identification of distinct themes in criminal activity that enables them to be differentiated from each other does raise the question of whether these different criminal emphases may be linked to more generally recognized aspects of personality. However, the earlier discussion indicates that it may not be appropriate to consider broad aspects of personality because what is at the heart of criminality does not appear to be some general mental or emotional process. Rather, it is the ways of relating to others, whether it be identified as an aspect of Extraversion or psychopathy.

It can therefore be proposed that any potential relationship between crime and personality should be looked for in areas that may be most likely to reflect those particular aspects of a person that relate to their criminality. Canter (1989) argued that the central feature of being criminal was what it implied about the relationship between people. It is the breaking of social norms, rather than some objective act, and thus always implies that the offender is doing something of social significance not just of material import. In other words, crime is an interpersonal transaction. Therefore it is proposed that an index of personality that reflects styles of contact between the criminal and others may be especially relevant. This is distinct from a clinical or psychiatric view of crime, that is inherently individualistic. It is also different from the criminological perspective that interprets crime entirely in terms of social and cultural processes.

The interpersonal perspective on the differences in offence themes also addresses the important point articulated in most detail by Mischel and Peake (1982) that any consistency found in a person's actions are likely to be related to the nature of the situation in which the actions occur. By focusing on crime one step is being taken towards consistency in situation, but by taking the further step of identifying the dominant incentive that characterizes that event for the person

acting, the situation is defined even more precisely. The third clarification comes from addressing just the interpersonal characteristics of the interaction.

This interpersonal approach is developed from the recognition that all crimes involve a relationship, to a greater or lesser degree, between the offender and his/her victim. In some cases, such as rape or murder, this relationship will be explicit. In other crimes, such as burglary or theft, there will be an implicit relationship. In these crimes, although the offender and victim do not relate to each other directly, aspects of the victim and his/her behaviour will still have some bearing on the behaviour of the offender. Thus, whether explicit or implicit, most crimes involve some sort of relationship between offender and victim.

An approach to personality that is particularly relevant to the interpersonal perspective is Schutz's (1958) Fundamental Interpersonal Orientations (FIRO) theory of personality. FIRO theory considers both the interpersonal tendencies that the individual has in relation to others and the behaviour that the individual tends to receive from others. This holistic conception of personality, as not simply the outward dispositional tendencies of the individual, but also the habitual responses he or she tends to elicit from others, may be particularly pertinent to the criminal's transactions with others.

Schutz posits three core personality facets on which these interpersonal tendencies will vary: Control, Inclusion and Openness. Youngs (2004) hypothesized that these would relate directly to the distinctions in offending derived from the social cognitive incentive-based perspective. She therefore examined the correlations between FIRO score and the dominant themes in her sample of 207 young offenders.

The Control facet is concerned with power, authority and dominance; individuals vary in the extent to which they attempt to exert control over others (Expressed Control). Individuals high on Expressed Control feel comfortable giving orders to and competing with others. Received Control is the interpersonal desire tendency to allow oneself to be controlled by others. The Control aspect of personality was found to be related in some way to each of the three styles of offending.

The findings distinguished power gain offending, in which higher levels of offending were related to increased levels of Expressed Control, from both material and sensory high gain offending, in which higher levels of offending were related to decreased levels of Received Control. The high levels of Expressed Control, reflected in agreement with interpersonal tendencies such as 'I take charge when I am with people' can be readily understood within a social cognitive framework as a reflection of the higher levels of skill in these acts, which result in better outcomes and increases incentive to exhibit these types of behaviours.

In contrast, high levels of material and sensory styles were found to be related to lower levels of Received Control. According to Bandura, this fits with the idea that personality may impact on behaviour through self-regulatory processes, and suggests that these individuals have a general tendency to self-regulate rather than allow others to proscribe activities. Material crime can be conceptualized in this way as the taking of items that are not available only because society deems that

taking them is against the law. Increased levels of sensory crime can be understood in terms of the implication that these individuals are less controllable, and are therefore expected to have a greater need for stimulation.

The dominant distinction here is between crimes that relate directly to control over others, most clearly seen in crimes of violence, and crimes that are more directly related to the instrumental benefits to the individual. The overlap in results for the sensation-seeking and material gain offenders may be because of the need for monetary gain to feed sensation-seeking habits, notably drug addiction. This all adds up to a complex mix of ways of relating to others, both in terms of the extent of how open or inclusive the interactions are and also how much the individual wants to be in control. The findings indicate that the profile across these different ways of relating to others will be characteristically different for offenders who tend to one sort of crime or another, in particular whether their crimes are typically violent or property-related.

### **Criminals' emotions and personal constructs**

Viewing crime as an interpersonal activity in which people seek power or other forms of gratification by the way they interact with others or their property presupposes fundamental psychological benefits to criminal activity. As mentioned, Katz (1988) eloquently argued that these benefits derived from the emotions evoked from criminal activity, captured in the title of his book *The seductions of crime*. This is a different perspective from expecting there to be some emotional disturbance in the offender, although that is doubtless present in some cases. It also implies that all crimes have some of the sensation-related aspects that are so strong in the sub-set Youngs (2004) described as having a dominant incentive in this area. However, there seems to have been little empirical exploration of the emotional benefits of crime except for the initial study by Canter and Ioannou (2004). They asked a wide range of eighty-three incarcerated offenders to indicate how they felt when committing a crime they could remember well.

Using the framework for the structure of emotions proposed by Russell (1997), they were able to show that the same variety of emotions did occur across crimes but that there was a tendency for criminals' emotions to be more extremely positive or negative. In other words, offending was associated with more extreme emotions than other aspects of daily life. Furthermore, there was a tendency for crimes against property to be associated with pleasant or even exciting emotions, whilst crimes against the person were more likely to have negative emotional associations. This raises the question of what it is about the person and the criminal activities they perform which is generated by or gives rise to the emotional content of criminality. A cognitive perspective would lead to the proposal that it is the offender's interpretation of the criminal situation that generates the emotional frisson; for example, the excitement of obtaining goods illegally, or the despair and anger with a partner who has cheated the offender.

The emphasis on the way offenders makes sense of their context, the people within it and their actions has been explored in particular depth by Personal Construct Psychologists as espoused by Kelly (1955). Houston (1998) has laid out this perspective in some detail. She explored offenders' construct systems, which incorporates their construing of both themselves and the others with whom they interact, as well as their criminal actions. The structure and content of this system, especially as revealed through the use of the Repertory Grid (Fransella, Bell and Bannister 2004) can indicate whether the offender is readily open to change in his actions or has such a rigid view of others and himself that modification of his behaviour will be extremely difficult. However, a strongly cognitive approach tends to undervalue the importance of the emotional benefits of crime, which must also be explored.

### **Criminal roles and personal narratives**

At the heart of the personal construct approach is the exploration of the offender's self-concept and how that is construed in relation to others and the unfolding criminal actions. So although constructs are seen as dynamic and changeable and there is a definite emphasis on the way a person sees himself at different stages in his life, nonetheless the repertory grid and conceptualization of the construct system tends to be a rather static slice through an evolving cognitive process. Unless explored with great subtlety the construct system derived from the grid can be a rather abstract exploration of the individual independent of the social context. It thus can underplay the world view that the offender creates for himself.

The consideration of the criminal as making choices and re-interpreting the blame for their actions is most clearly articulated by Yochelson and Samenow (Samenow 1984). This may be mistaken for a clinical diagnosis similar to the notion of psychopathy or personality disorder, as Wrightsman, Nietzel and Fortune (1998) suggest. But that is to undervalue the construct system that gives shape to the decisions to offend and the emotional benefits that derive from criminal actions.

An approach that is being explored to elaborate the dynamic nature of criminal actions is what is being called the 'narrative approach' within psychology, most clearly articulated in the writing of McAdams (1988), as developed by Canter (1994). Within this framework the individual is seen as developing an understanding of himself and his interactions as an unfolding narrative, a story we all create in which we are the dominant protagonist. This perspective has been developed for empirical study by Canter, Kaouri and Ioannou (2003) by asking offenders to indicate the role they think best describes what they were doing when committing a crime, e.g., victim, hero, professional, criminal, etc. The idea here is that the role label captures an implicit narrative within which the offender can see himself acting through a series of episodes.

Analysis of responses from 161 convicted offenders suggested that the dominant narratives that offences enshrined related to the four major myths identified by the literary critic Frye (1957). They see their actions as tragic, adventures, romances or meaningless comedies. This speculative framework has the strength of showing how a criminal's view of himself and his actions may have roots in the culture of which he is a part, but gives emphasis to his interpretation of his criminal role in a way that is compatible with a personal construct perspective. It also helps to provide a framework for what drives the emotional content of the criminal's actions. It would be hypothesized that there will be a strong relationship between the roles a person associates with his actions and the emotions that he feels. The causal direction for the association between roles and emotions requires further careful study.

The embedding of a criminal role within a personal narrative that the offender sees himself acting out, must be assumed to evolve and develop during his criminal career. This framework therefore does not seek an enduring aspect of a person's personality traits as a useful aspect of his criminality. Rather, it sees the person building a criminal narrative for himself. This helps to explain offences such as terrorism, fraud or murders that are committed by people who have no obvious criminal precursors in their lives. It also connects more directly with the legal emphasis on human agency that is so different from the biosocial emphasis on causation outside of the person. The concept a person has of himself, however confused, which underlies his actions in dealing with others, given direction and life by the narrative it is part of, recognizes that actions are the product of a person and his experiences. It is thus fundamentally psychological. Yet it also puts the individual in the driving seat, giving agency a distinct part to play. Unless the person is unaware of his actions or their consequences because of mental disability, the narrative perspective holds them responsible, just as the law does.

### **Implications of linking personality and crime**

These issues are relevant to many areas of application including the popularly misconceived aspects of 'offender profiling'. The prospect that it should be possible to identify distinct features of an offender's personality from the details of the crime he has committed seems only feasible under very special circumstances. There may be some general trends that distinguish offenders from non-offenders but beyond that, as Youngs (2007) has elaborated, the details of the criminal actions require very careful scrutiny if they are to indicate anything distinct about the offender. The task is made more demanding by the fact that it is necessary to understand what the crime means to the offender, not just what its objective characteristics are.

There is also the interesting relationship between the consideration of the personality of offenders and the ways in which juries may take note of evidence



about the character of a defendant, as explored for example by Hunt and Budesheim (2004). The research reviewed above indicates that juries should be very cautious about assuming there will be very distinct and clear aspects of a defendant's personality that will mark him out as a criminal. Consistency across a range of similar situations may be a reasonable assumption provided those situations are perceived as similar by the defendant.

Programmes for the rehabilitation of offenders generally avoid any attempt to take account of the offender's personality, but rather (as explored in some detail for example by Houston (1998)) seek to connect with his understanding of his crimes and their consequences. The narrative framework adds a further emphasis to this process by proposing that the offender should be encouraged to develop a different role for himself and try to see himself as part of a different sort of life story, as elaborated in narrative therapy (Crossley 2000). Interestingly, the emergence of restorative justice procedures, whereby the offender is confronted by his victims, can be seen as a way of enabling the offender to understand more fully the interpersonal role he is actually playing and to help him find a more productive life story to live by.

## Conclusions

Focusing on aspects of the personality of offenders is not to deny the social, economic, cultural and even political foundations out of which crime grows. Nor is it an attempt to explain criminality solely in terms of genetic, hormonal or other physiological aspects of criminals and thereby deny the societal causes of crime. Rather, the purpose is to focus attention on the crucial role that the person has in carrying out a crime. This is essential if the social and behavioural sciences are to be integrated within the legal system that puts so much emphasis on the intention and conscious action of the criminal.

The study of the relationship between crime and personality also offers some real insights for the more general consideration of personality. It draws attention to the importance of building up frameworks for considering the situations in which people act. Defining personality as an enduring aspect of an individual independently of where those acts take place will doom this area of psychology to what McAdams (1994) calls 'a psychology of the stranger'. Crime is an example of a complex human process that is defined by social norms and consists of many different types of activity. The relevance of the personality of the individual who carries out criminal actions, just as for those who carry out any other naturally occurring action, has to be understood within the social and cultural context of those actions. What the individual brings to the criminal event, as to any other, is an evolving changing set of interactions. The underlying theme of these interactions will be a subtle mix of their experiences and their interpretation of those experiences. Criminals are more like the rest of us than it is often comfortable to accept.

## References

- Bandura, A. 1986. *Social foundations of thought and action: a social cognitive theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall
- Canter, D. 1989. Offender profiles, *The Psychologist* 2(1): 12–16
1994. *Criminal shadows*. London: HarperCollins
- Canter, D., Bennell, C., Alison, L. and Reddy, S. 2003. Differentiating sex offences: a behaviourally based thematic classification of stranger rapes, *Behavioural Sciences and the Law* 21: 157–74
- Canter, D. and Ioannou, M. 2004. A multivariate model of stalking behaviours, *Behaviourmetrika* 31(2): 1–18
- Canter, D., Kaouri, C. and Ioannou, M. 2003. The facet structure of criminal narratives, in S. Levy and D. Elizur (eds.), *Facet theory: towards cumulative social science*, pp. 27–38. Ljubljana: Center for Educational Development
- Canter, D. and Youngs, D. 2003. Beyond ‘offender profiling’: the need for an investigative psychology, in D. Carson and R. Bull (eds.), *Handbook of psychology in legal contexts*, 2nd edn, pp. 171–205. Chichester: Wiley
2008. *Investigative psychology: offender profiling and the analysis of criminal action*. Chichester: Wiley
- Cooke, D. J. 2007. Psychopathy and an important construct: past, present and future, in D. Canter and R. Zukauskienė (eds.), *Psychology and law: bridging the gap*, pp. 167–90. Aldershot: Ashgate
- Crossley, M. L. 2000. *Introducing narrative psychology: self, trauma and the construction of meaning*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press
- Cullen, F. T., Gendreau, P., Jarjoura, G. R. and Wright J. P. 1997. Crime and the bell curve: lessons from intelligent criminology, *Crime and Delinquency* 3(4): 387–411
- Denton, K. and Krebs, D. 1990. From the scene to the crime: the effect of alcohol and social context on moral judgement, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 59: 242–8
- Dishion, T. J., Loeber, R., Stouthamer-Loeber, M. and Skinner, M. L. 1984. Skills deficits and male adolescent delinquency, *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology* 12: 37–53
- Emler, N. P., Heather, N. and Winton, M. 1978. Delinquency and the development of moral reasoning, *British Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology* 17: 321–5
- Eysenck, H. J. and Gudjonsson, G. H. 1989. *The causes and consequences of crime*. New York: Plenum Press
- Farrington, D. P. 1995. The development of offending and anti-social behaviour from childhood: key findings from the Cambridge study on Delinquent Development, *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 36(3): 929–64
- Farrington, D. P., Jolliffe, D., Loeber, R., Stouthamer-Loeber, M. and Kalb, L. 2001. The concentration of offenders in families, and family criminality in the prediction of boys’ delinquency, *Journal of Adolescence* 24: 579–96
- Fazel, S. and Danesh, J. 2002. Serious mental disorder in 23,000 prisoners: a systematic review of 62 surveys, *The Lancet* 359: 545–50
- Fransella, F., Bell, B. and Bannister, D. 2004. *A Manual for repertory grid technique*, 2nd edn. Chichester: Wiley

- Fritzon, K., Canter, D. and Wilton, Z. 2001. The application of an action systems model to destructive behaviour: the examples of arson and terrorism, *Behavioural Sciences and Law* 19(5-6): 657-90
- Frye, N. 1957. *Anatomy of criticism*. Princeton University Press
- Gatzke-Kopp, L. M., Raine, A., Loeber, R., Stouthamer-Loeber, M. and Steinhauer, S. R. 2002. Serious delinquent behaviour, sensation seeking, and electrodermal arousal, *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology* 30(5): 477-86
- Gottfredson, M. R. and Hirschi, T. 1990. *A general theory of crime*. Stanford University Press
- Haney, C. 2007. The consequences of prison life: notes on the new psychology of prison effects, in D. Canter and R. Zukauskienė (eds.), *Psychology and law: bridging the gap*, pp. 143-66. Aldershot: Ashgate
- Hare, R. D. 2003. *Hare Psychopathy Checklist - Revised*, 2nd edn. Toronto: Multi Health Systems, Inc
- Hirschi, T. 1969. *Causes of delinquency*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press
- Hodgins, S., Mednick, S. A., Brennan, P. A., Schulsinger, F. and Engberg, M. 1996. Mental disorder and crime: evidence from a Danish birth cohort, *Archives of General Psychiatry* 53: 489-96
- Horvath, P. and Zuckerman, M. 1992. Sensation seeking, risk appraisal, and risky behaviour, *Personality and Individual Psychology* 14(1): 41-52
- Houston, J. 1998. *Making sense with offenders: personal constructs, therapy and change*. Chichester: Wiley
- Hunt, J. S. and Budesheim, T. L. 2004. How jurors use and misuse character evidence, *Journal of Applied Psychology* 89(2): 347-61
- Jurokovic, G. J. 1980. The juvenile delinquent as a moral philosopher: a structural-developmental perspective, *Psychological Bulletin* 88: 709-27
- Katz, J. 1988. *Seductions of crime: moral and sensual attractions in doing evil*. New York: Basic Books
- Kelly, G. E. 1955. *The psychology of personal constructs*. New York: Norton
- Kohlberg, L. 1981. *The philosophy of moral development: moral stages and the idea of justice*. San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row
- Lobato, A. 2000. Criminal weapon use in Brazil: a psychological analysis, in D. Canter and L. Alison (eds.), *Profiling property crimes*, pp. 107-46. Aldershot: Ashgate
- Ly, L. and Foster, S. 2005. *Statistics of mentally disordered offenders 2004: England and Wales*. London: Home Office Statistical Bulletin 22/05, [www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds](http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds)
- Lynam, D., Moffitt, T. and Stouthamer-Loeber, M. 1993. Explaining the relation between I.Q. and delinquency: class, race, test motivation, school-failure, and self-control, *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* 102: 187-96
- McAdams D. P. 1988. *Power, intimacy and the life story: personological inquiries into identity*. New York: Guilford Press
1994. A psychology of the stranger, *Psychological Inquiry* 5(2): 145-8
- Mischel, W. and Peake, P. K. 1982. Beyond déjà vu in the search for cross-situational consistency, *Psychological Review* 89: 730-55
- O'Leary, K. D. 1993. Through a psychological lens: personality traits, personality disorders, and levels of violence, in R. J. Gelles and D. R. Loseke (eds.), *Current controversies on family violence*, pp. 7-30. Newbury Park, CA: Sage

- O'Reilly-Fleming, T. 1992. From beasts to bedlam: Hadfield, the Regency crisis, M'Naghten and the 'mad' business in Britain, 1788–1843, *Journal of Psychiatry and Law* 20: 167–90
- Richardson, K. 1999. *The making of intelligence*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson
- Russell, J. A. 1997. How shall an emotion be called?, in R. Plutchik and H. R. Conte (eds.), *Circumplex models of personality and emotions*, pp. 205–20. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association
- Salfati, C. G. and Haratsis, E. 2001. Greek homicide: a behavioural examination of offender crime scene actions, *Homicide Studies* 5(4): 335–62
- Samenow, S. E. 1984. *Inside the criminal mind*. New York: Times Books
- Schutz, W. 1958. *FIRO: a three dimensional theory of interpersonal behaviour*. New York: Rinehart
- Singleton, N., Bumpstead, R., O'Brien, M., Lee, A. and Meltzer, H. 2001. *Psychiatric morbidity among adults living in private households, 2000*. London: The Stationery Office, [www.statistics.gov.uk](http://www.statistics.gov.uk)
- Singleton, N., Meltzer, H., Gatward, R., Coid, J. and Deasy, D. 1998. *Psychiatric morbidity among prisoners in England and Wales*. London: The Stationery Office, [www.statistics.gov.uk](http://www.statistics.gov.uk)
- Stephenson, G. M. 1992. *The psychology of criminal justice*. Oxford: Blackwell
- Wrightsmann, L. S., Nietzel, M. T. and Fortune, W. H. 1998. *Psychology and the legal system*, 4th edn. London: Brooks/Cole
- Youngs, D. 2004. Personality correlates of offence style, *Journal of Investigative Psychology and Offender Profiling* 1: 99–119
2007. Contemporary challenges in investigative psychology: revisiting the offender profiling equations, in D. Canter and R. Zuckauskiene (eds.), *Psychology and law: bridging the gap*, pp. 23–30. Aldershot: Ashgate
- Youngs, D., Canter, D. and Cooper, J. 2004. The facets of criminality: a cross-modal and cross-gender validation, *Behaviourmetika* 31(2): 1–13